

# Saxophone

## Low Notes

### *Tips from the Masters*

By Sean Murphy

Articulating low notes is perhaps one of the most difficult and frustrating aspects of playing the saxophone. Many students become easily discouraged while playing the lowest notes on the saxophone (written C4, B3, and B $\flat$ 3.) They experience such unpleasant results as playing an octave too high, producing a fuzzy sound, or failing to make a sound at all. Furthermore, playing these notes can sometimes conjure anxiety and physical

tension in the upper body. Younger students may not feel confident of the fingerings, because intermediate-level music rarely descends into this range. Unfamiliarity with the fingering causes a delay in tongue and finger coordination at the start of the note, which makes a clear articulation and tone nearly impossible for a note in this range. These factors greatly inhibit the chance for a clear articulation in this range. Here are perspectives on the extreme low range of the instrument from well-known saxophonists who perform and teach in a variety of genres.

#### **Jeff Coffin**

The lower (and higher) extremes of the saxophone present a number of difficulties, articulation notwithstanding. I find that having the correct setup between the reed and mouthpiece is extremely important in getting the quickness of response in the low end. I take special care to make sure the reed is balanced side to side.

I use the entire range when I am playing and practicing patterns, scales, or just improvising freely. One technique I have found that works really well in the low register is playing scales in five-note groupings.



Photo by Kirby Fong

This should be continued throughout the whole range of the instrument and in every key.



